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ABSTRACT

Established in 1989, the Birmingham (Alabama) Public Schools' Infant Care Training Project is an essential component of the Ensley Young Mothers' program, an alternative program for pregnant teenagers. Approximately 250 pregnant students aged 12 to 18 enroll voluntarily in the program each school year. Approximately 90 percent are economically disadvantaged. After the birth of her baby, the student transfers back to 1 of the system's 10 high schools or 18 middle schools. Support services include a full-time obstetric nurse, school counselor, tutoring, parenting education, comprehensive high school education, modified physical education, home study, and community service referrals. Through the vocational component, the project assists the student in securing entry-level job skills as an infant care aide, strengthening parenting skills, and accessing infant care in order to complete her education. The project provides day care services in the Infant Care Center, which serves as a laboratory extension of the Infant Care Services Course. Intervention strategies used to increase the ability of this at-risk student population to secure employment or enter a postsecondary program upon graduation include vocational, health, counseling, educational, and child care services. To provide a variety of resources to the student, interagency partnerships are maintained with community agencies, professional organizations, and the medical community. (YLB)

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BIRMINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOL'S INFANT CARE TRAINING PROJECT

A LEARNING CENTER FOR TEENAGE MOTHERS

Teenage pregnancy is frequently cited among the critical issues facing America's youth. Its negative effects impact the physical health, emotional stability, and future productivity of the adolescent parent. Nationwide, approximately 70% of these young mothers will drop out of school and 50% will never graduate. This waste of human potential is unconscionable.

Since the public school is an institution already equipped to deal with many of the problems of adolescence, it is timely and appropriate that it address the educational implications of teenage pregnancy. The Birmingham Public School's Infant Care Training Project was established in 1989 as an essential component of the Ensley Young Mothers' Program - an alternative program for pregnant teenagers. Approximately 250 pregnant students enroll in the Young Mothers' Program each school year. These pregnant students are 12 to 18 years of age. Approximately 90% are economically disadvantaged. Students are referred by a school counselor, assistant principal, or principal. Enrollment is voluntary; students choose to enroll based on the special services offered by the program. The student normally stays in this alternative program until the end of the semester in which her infant is born. She then transfers back to one of the system's ten high schools or eighteen middle schools.

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Certain support services are provided by the Young Mothers' Program to assist the pregnant teenager. They include:

* full-time obstetric nurse provided through the Jefferson County Health Department to track the progress of each student throughout her pregnancy and make referrals to appropriate health providers. Prenatal and postnatal health and counseling support is also offered through her Teen Self-Help Clinic.

* school counselor to assist students in making an easier transition from their home school. She conducts counseling sessions aimed at delaying a second early pregnancy and promoting post-secondary education or job training.

* tutoring services to enhance the educational support services to students are provided through the Comprehensive At-Risk Educational Services (CARES) program.

* parenting education offered to strengthen parenting skills. Prenatal development and proper health care during pregnancy are discussed. The developmental principals related to early childhood are explored.

* comprehensive high school education offered through Ensley Magnet High School. A core of academic teachers tracks the progress of students during their stay in the program.

* modified physical education for pregnant adolescents teaches prenatal and postnatal exercises along with good health practices during pregnancy.

* home study provided during delivery confinement to maintain the educational process while the student is absent from school.
* community service referrals when the program is unable to meet specific needs of the student.

As the vocational component of the Young Mothers' Program, the Infant Care Training Project assists the pregnant and parenting adolescent in: (1) securing entry level job skills as an infant care aide; (2) strengthening individual parenting skills; (3) accessing infant care in

order to complete her education.

In addition, the Infant Care Training Project provides day care services for twenty infants in its Infant Care Center. It is maintained by two foster grandmothers, two aides, student volunteers, and student mothers. The center serves as a laboratory extension of the Infant Care Services Course. This course offers students the opportunity to develop basic skills necessary for providing caregiving services to infants as a parent and child care worker.

A number of intervention strategies are utilized to increase the ability of this at-risk student population to assume responsibility for a productive future. By accessing vocational, health, counseling, educational, and child care services, this interactive project guides its students to secure employment or to enter a post-secondary program upon graduation.

With financial assistance from the Birmingham Board of Education, a Single Parents-Displaced Homemakers and/or Single Pregnant Women Grant, March of Dimes Grant, and American Home Economics Association Massachusetts Building Assets Fund, the Infant Care Training Project provides specific hands-on job training skills related to the child care profession. As the teen mother becomes more confident in her caregiving role through course study and laboratory experiences, her ability to care for infants in a group setting increases as well as her ability to make sound decisions regarding the rearing of her own child.

To foster the optimal growth of the pregnant and parenting student, interagency partnerships are developed to provide a variety of resources. A vigorous relationship is maintained with community agencies, professional organizations, and the medical community. A highly-qualified Advisory Committee meets periodically to offer guidelines and suggestions which have resulted in the continued improvement of the project. As a local and national award-winner, the Infant Care Training Project serves as a model for school systems throughout the southeast as it focuses on a comprehensive network of services to insure a positive outcome for the pregnant and parenting adolescent student.

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